

## Baby Loggerhead Turtles Associated with Sargassum Weed

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IN evaluating theories to explain the disappearance of young sea turtles during their first year or so of life, Carr (1967a, 1967b) discussed the possibility that they may shelter and feed in sargassum rafts, and cited word-of-mouth observations to support the idea.

Smith (1968) reported a neonate loggerhead that was captured at sea in a net along with sargassum weed and juvenile fishes characteristic of the sargassum community. It is likely that the turtle had been associated with weed, but it cannot be said for certain since the net was towed for about two miles and Smith also reported young loggerheads that were seen on the surface at other times that were not associated with weed, and cited other similar records.

During late October, 1968, a series of strong northeasterly winds littered the open Atlantic beaches in northeastern Florida with large amounts of fresh sargassum weed. Following each of these blows, persons brought live baby loggerheads, *Caretta caretta caretta*, to Marineland of Florida. The turtles had been found on the beach associated with the weed; they were brought to us in groups of one to six. Their condition varied from almost dead to vigorous, probably depending on the length of time in the sun on the beach. Healthy ones were fed for several days and released. One that died was deposited in the collections of the Florida State Museum (UF 27019). Carapace length, measured in a straight line, was 58.6 mm; since this is larger than any reported loggerhead at hatching in this region, it clearly indicates that the turtle had been living at sea for a month or two (Caldwell, Carr, and Hellier, 1956; Caldwell, 1962).

Several of the turtles had light encrustations of the bryozoans and worm tubes typical of sargassum weed communities, suggesting that the turtles had been in association with the weed for some time.

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